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ABSTRACT

This study examined how higher education is represented in the press by analyzing how four leading newspapers, "The New York Times," "USA Today," "The Washington Post," and "The Wall Street Journal," covered higher education in 1997. The study analyzed a total of 610 higher education stories covering 21 topics. The 10 topics on which articles were most frequently written were: (1) affirmative action; (2) costs and price; (3) crime/tragedies; (4) financial aid; (5) government relations; (6) job market for graduates; (7) campus management; (8) military academies; (9) campus performance; and (10) research. The study also analyzed "news frame" and sources. News frame was defined as the tone or perspective of each story and was analyzed in terms of five mutually exclusive categories: conflict, consensus, failure, success, and other. Sources included eight frequently cited categories, including: campus administrators, advocacy groups, experts, faculty, presidents/chancellors, professionals, public officials, and students. Differences among the newspapers were also examined. Overall, the study found that all four papers frequently reported on college management issues, crime and tragedies, and affirmative action, but devoted significantly less attention to research and curriculum. The papers most often quoted campus administrators as sources. Nine charts provide detailed findings. (DB)

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ED 434 620

Higher Education IN THE News

A L[illegible] into the Topics, [illegible]ources, and Vie[illegible]s of the Pri[illegible] Media.

CASE

COUNCIL FOR ADVANCEMENT AND SUPPORT OF [illegible]

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Higher Education IN THE *News*

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Higher Education IN THE *News*

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, commencement, financial aid, and tuition are among the issues that make higher education a staple of news coverage. Media coverage of these topics has given the public a portrait of higher education's accomplishments, challenges, and controversies. Higher education reporting has also tapped into concerns that go beyond the realm of higher education, such as crimes committed on or near campuses, the admission of women to The Citadel and the Virginia Military Institute, and the state of the job market for college graduates. These stories blend issues facing higher education with such disparate topics as public safety, gender, and the economy.

Certainly the news media's focus on education topics that resonate beyond campuses is nothing new. Coverage of the exclusion of non-Anglo-Saxon students from prestigious campuses in the 1920s and 1930s cut to the core of the United States' democratic ideals. Stories on student protests of the Vietnam War in the 1960s stretched into the domains of race, class, and presidential power. Similarly, coverage of demonstrations against university investments in South Africa in the 1980s was relevant to American foreign policy and to issues of race. News on higher education in the mid- to late-1990s has followed this historical pattern.

The wide range of subjects under the umbrella of higher education coverage raises several questions about the nature

of news content. Since the issues covered vary widely, it is likely that the attributes of news about higher education are also diverse. Which sorts of topics receive primary attention? Whom do journalists most often quote in education stories? What is the tone of education coverage, and how does it vary by topic and news organization?

This study examines how higher education is represented in the press by analyzing how four leading newspapers cover higher education. Do *The New York Times* and *USA Today* rely on different sources in reporting on affirmative action? Is *The Washington Post* more likely than *The Wall Street Journal* to focus on conflict? Which publication shows the most interest in covering financial aid? By focusing on these kinds of questions, this study aims both to capture the nature of higher education coverage in 1997, and to compare the news angles and story topics appearing in four top newspapers.

While conclusions about higher education coverage are limited to four publications, the results also suggest some common features of higher education coverage among national news organizations as a whole. Studies have shown that *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* often set the agenda for other news organizations in government and politics. The same may be true for higher education.

– James Devitt

Note: Special thanks goes to the American Council on Education Library and Information Service, which supplied the newspaper clips that are the basis of this study. Readers should be aware that this study is intended only as a general survey of coverage in 1997; it is not meant to constitute a scientific analysis of every story published by the newspapers chosen. Despite efforts at comprehensiveness, the newspapers studied here may have printed higher education stories that are not included in this analysis.

Method

The study's sample is based on 1997 higher education stories gathered by the American Council on Education (ACE). The analysis includes only stories that mention higher education in the headline or lead paragraphs. It excludes newspaper columns, editorials, cartoons, charts, graphs, tables, sports stories, letters to the editor, and obituaries.

The study analyzes coverage of the following newspapers:

- *The New York Times*
- *USA Today*
- *The Wall Street Journal*
- *The Washington Post*

This study analyzes a total of 610 higher education stories in 1997, covering 21 topics. The study focuses on the 10 topics on which the stories were most frequently based: 1) affirmative action, 2) costs and price, 3) crime/tragedies, 4) financial aid, 5) government relations, 6) job market for graduates, 7) campus management, 8) military academies, 9) campus performance, and 10) research (see Appendix for a description of each topic). There were 458 stories covering these 10 topics.

News Frame and Sources

The study considers two additional features: news frame and sources. News frame is defined as the tone or perspective established in each story's headline and lead. Most of the time, the headline and lead reflect the same tone, or news frame. But when the headline and lead contain different news frames, the lead determines the news frame because it reflects the reporter's — rather than the headline writer's — words.

There are five mutually exclusive news frame categories: conflict, consensus, failure, success, and other. Conflict and consensus pertain to the words or actions of the parties involved in the story. Conflict is either criticism by one party of another (e.g., a faculty member criticizing an administrator) or a disagreement between parties. Consensus is praise of one party by another or agreement between two or more parties.

Failure and success reflect the reporter's perspective. Failure is an account of the shortcomings of an individual or individuals, an institution, or a policy. Success is an account of the accomplishments of an individual or individuals, an institution, or a policy.

A majority of the leads and headlines fall in the "other" category, which means that they do not contain conflict, consensus, failure, or success.

The study also analyzes the sources in the stories. It reflects only the presence of a particular type of source in each story, rather than the number of times an individual source appears. For example, a story quoting a college president once has the same source total as a story quoting four different college presidents. The 610 stories in the study's initial sample quote a total of 11 different categories of sources. Forty-nine of the stories do not quote any source.

This study examines the eight most frequently cited categories of sources: 1) campus administrators, 2) advocacy groups, 3) experts, 4) faculty, 5) presidents/ chancellors, 6) professionals (e.g. lawyers and businesspersons), 7) public officials, and 8) students (see Appendix for a fuller description of

categories). There are 938 sources appearing within the top 10 story topics.

The categories of sources are mutually exclusive. While some sources could fit into more than one category, the context in which such sources appear determines their category. For example, an economics professor who is quoted in a story about the job market for college graduates is categorized as an expert rather than a faculty member.

Results

All Topics

The 610 stories analyzed focus primarily or exclusively on higher education. Topics range from admissions to the job market to town/gown relations.

As Chart 1 indicates, the most frequently covered topic is campus management (128 stories). Stories in this category pertain to the business or personnel management of colleges and universities. They include news on campus budgets, personnel changes (e.g., retirements, the

CHART 1: TOPICS COVERED BY EACH PUBLICATION

	Publication				
Topic	NY Times	USA Today	Wash Post	WSJ	Grand Total
Admissions/Applications	4	11	2	0	17
Affirmative Action	20	10	14	3	47
Campus Groups	5	6	3	0	14
Campus Management	61	7	53	7	128
Campus Performance	7	6	9	1	23
Costs	9	8	7	3	27
Crime/Tragedies	21	8	26	0	55
Curriculum	10	3	4	3	20
Faculty Issues	2	2	0	1	5
Financial Aid	19	12	16	9	56
Fund Raising	7	1	8	1	17
Government Relations	9	4	6	4	23
International	6	0	3	0	9
Job Market	4	6	1	12	23
Military Academies	18	12	22	1	53
Rankings	2	1	1	0	4
Research	11	2	5	5	23
Tenure	1	0	3	1	5
Testing/Standards	11	4	1	0	16
Town/Gown Relations	5	4	6	1	16
Other	13	3	10	3	29
Grand Total	245	110	200	55	610

CHART 2: TOP 10 TOPICS BY NEWS FRAME (IN PERCENTAGES)

	News Frame					
Topic	Conflict	Consensus	Failure	Success	Other	Total
Affirmative Action	40.4	0	2.1	0	57.4	100
Campus Management	35.2	0	4.7	4.7	55.5	100
Campus Performance	4.3	0	8.7	21.7	65.2	100
Costs	25.9	0	3.7	0	70.4	100
Crime/Tragedies	20.0	0	3.6	0	76.4	100
Financial Aid	25.0	1.8	5.4	14.3	53.6	100
Government Relations	65.2	0	0	4.3	30.4	100
Job Market	4.3	0	0	8.7	87.0	100
Military Academies	45.3	0	0	0	54.7	100
Research	39.1	0	0	8.7	52.2	100
Total	31.9	0.2	3.3	5.2	59.4	100

Note: Percentages in all charts have been rounded.

hiring and firing of presidents, etc.), and accreditation. The category's breadth explains, in part, why it is the most heavily covered topic. This breadth also shows, however, that newspapers look beyond the classroom and the laboratory in their search for higher education news stories. This practice is also evident in the use of sources, as discussed below.

The four newspapers combined ran fewer than 50 total stories on curriculum (20) and research (23). In contrast, they printed 56 stories on financial aid, 55 on crimes and tragedies that occurred on or near campuses, 47 on affirmative action, and 53 on the nation's military academies — 25 of which cover the admission, hazing, and departure of women at The Citadel. This suggests that coverage of higher education tends to focus on areas that extend beyond lecture halls and laboratories. By devoting attention to affirmative action, management, and crime,[1] the news media cover colleges and universities in the way they might cover corporations or communities facing budgetary, personnel, racial, and safety issues. An exception to this practice is the heavy coverage of financial aid. While this topic does not pertain directly to either the classroom or the laboratory, it involves the important issue of access to postsecondary learning.

By devoting attention to affirmative action, management, and crime, the news media covered colleges and universities in the way they would cover corporations or communities facing budgetary, personnel, racial, and safety issues.

News Frame

As noted in the Method section, further analysis considered only the 10 most covered topics, which appeared in a total of 458 stories. The presentation, or news frame, of these topics falls into five mutually exclusive categories: conflict, consensus, failure, success, and other. Chart 2 shows the news frames for each topic as well as the overall distribution of news frames.

As Chart 2 reveals, nearly 60 percent of the stories fall into the "other" category. Headlines and leads in this category are best described as neutral. They often describe an action or topic in innocuous

[1] Some of these topics could have been combined to create fewer categories. For instance, affirmative action and financial aid could be placed in government relations. However, because these issues are covered extensively, they are separated into their own categories.

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terms, or include an anecdote to illustrate a larger trend. The following are examples of leads in this category:

> *(Virginia's) Council of Higher Education wants college students to lose their state financial aid if they fail to keep up their grades or if they take too long to graduate.* (The Washington Post, *November 25, 1997, p. B7)*

> *To begin at the end, Grace Greig is very, very happy at Barnard College, even if it was never part of her master plan. A year ago, while a senior at St. Stephen's Episcopal School in Austin, Texas, Greig had eyes only for Georgetown University. She liked Washington, DC, loved the campus, was impressed with the foreign studies program.* (USA Today, *November 26, 1997, p. 18D)*

A high proportion of stories — more than 30 percent — focus on conflict. This is not surprising because conflict is a long-established ingredient in news stories.

While a majority of the leads and headlines fall into the "other" category, more than 30 percent of stories focus on conflict. Conflict is a long-established ingredient in news stories, and the conflict news frame is particularly evident in coverage of affirmative action. More than 40 percent of the affirmative action stories focus on conflict in the headline and lead. For example:

> *The fight over class may not be a class act. When a federal court last year stopped Texas from admitting students to its universities on the basis of race, the state hardly flinched. It figured minority enrollment could still be maintained at current levels by switching preferences for poor or socially disadvantaged students.* (The Wall Street Journal, *April 10, 1997, p. A1)*

The conflict news frame is not limited to affirmative action, however. More than 35 percent of the stories on campus management contain conflict. Many of these stories center on disagreements between campus presidents or chancellors and their boards of trustees, particularly at the City University of New York:

> *Intensifying their attacks on the performance of W. Ann Reynolds, the Chancellor of the City University of New York, the new chairwoman and vice chairman of the university's board said yesterday that they would judge in the coming months whether she should continue in her job.* (The New York Times, *June 25, 1997, p. A21)*

Coverage of military academies contains a high-level of conflict, largely because of stories on the presence and departure of female cadets at The Citadel, a topic loaded with conflict. Conflict frames 18 of the 25 stories on The Citadel.

The remaining news frames — consensus, failure, and success — make up just under 9 percent of the 458 stories. Because stories in these categories form such a small proportion of the total, there is no meaningful association between these news frames and story topics. The following lead paragraphs are examples of each:

Consensus

> *Almost 30 years after the idea first occurred to him when he was an aide to Senator F. Kennedy of New York, Adam Wilinsky is finally watching the Police Corps come alive. He and others say it could fundamentally change the way police departments all over the country*

CHART 3: TOP EIGHT SOURCES AND T

	Affirmative Action	Campus Mngment	Campus Perf.
Administrators	25	73	11
Advocacy Groups	34	19	9
Experts	11	9	6
Faculty	6	34	7
Pres/Chan	8	62	6
Professionals	12	21	1
Public Officials	21	31	5
Students	11	29	7
Total	128	278	52

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serve their communities. (The New York Times, March 30, 1997, pg. A12)

Failure

As state governments keep whittling away their support for higher education, tuition at public institutions is likely to continue rising as financial aid shrinks, moving college further beyond the reach of poor students, education experts say. (The New York Times, January 27, 1997, B1)

Success

The percentage of college students defaulting on tuition loans, once one of the most serious problems in higher education, has declined to its lowest point. (The Washington Post, January 10, 1997, A2)

Sources

A total of 938 sources, each falling into one of the top eight categories, are quoted in the stories analyzed.[2] As previously noted, a category of source is counted only once in a given story, even if that source is quoted multiple times or if another source in the same category is quoted in the same story.

As Chart 3 shows, the 458 stories covering the 10 topics chosen for analysis in this study quote campus administrators more often than any other source. Campus administrators include vice presidents, deans, and trustees, but not presidents and chancellors, which represent a separate category of sources.

The high rate of campus administrators in the media is consistent with the level of campus management coverage. Campus management stories also quote presidents and chancellors more frequently than any other type of story. However, students and faculty are also quoted more often in campus management stories than anywhere else. Public officials, including legislators, mayors, and judges, are other common sources in campus management news. As Chart 4 shows, stories on campus management quote a greater diversity of sources than do stories on most other topics.

Stories on affirmative action also quote a wide range of sources — in fact, the widest range among all topic categories. Interestingly, sources for these stories are likely to come from outside academe. Advocacy groups are quoted more frequently than campus administrators, presidents, or students (see Chart 3). They often represent organizations that either support or oppose affirmative

[2] When all story topics and all sources are taken in account, there are 1,390 different sources cited in the 610 stories.

10 TOPICS

Costs	Crime/ Tragedies	Financial Aid	Govt. Rel.	Job Market	Military Acad.	Research	Grand Total
7	21	10	4	8	25	7	191
8	11	17	7	5	3	9	122
11	8	13	1	12	0	8	79
2	4	2	2	1	5	13	76
6	7	4	6	0	19	4	122
3	11	9	4	13	13	7	94
9	12	32	17	3	4	3	137
3	17	9	2	11	22	6	117
49	91	96	43	53	91	57	938

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CHART 4: SOURCES PER STORY TOPIC

Affirmative Action	2.70
Campus Management	2.17
Campus Performance	2.26
Costs	1.80
Crime/Tragedies	1.65
Financial Aid	1.71
Government Relations	1.87
Job Market	2.30
Military Academies	1.72
Research	2.48

action programs. Public officials appear more often than any college or university source, with the exception of campus administrators.

A similar phenomenon occurs with regard to financial aid. Public officials are quoted more frequently than any other source. By quoting non-campus sources in financial stories, news organizations are recognizing the importance of college financing to people and institutions beyond academe. On topics ranging from affirmative action to financial aid, higher education's newsworthiness is often based on issues and sources that extend beyond college campuses.

In contrast, stories on the military academies primarily quote campus sources, such as administrators, presidents or chancellors, and students. This may be because numerous stories on The Citadel, which report on the departure of some female cadets following allegations of hazing, are based on campus incidents, rather than the larger issue of gender equity. Consequently, advocacy groups and public officials are not frequently quoted in the 1997 stories.

Summary

Results show that the news media pay particular attention to higher education when issues arise that extend beyond academe. With minimal coverage of curriculum and research, the news media engage in heavy coverage of management, crime and tragedies, and affirmative action – topics of interest to readers outside of college and university campuses. The frequent citing of off-campus sources, such as advocacy groups and public officials, offers further evidence of this practice. One possible exception is the heavy coverage of financial aid, a topic that is primarily relevant to higher education. However, the top sources quoted in financial aid stories are public officials, rather than administrators or other campus sources.

Individual Newspapers

Like other comparisons among news organizations, this study shows similarities as well as differences in newspapers' coverage of education issues. However, one must be cautious in drawing conclusions. The study categorizes 458 stories and 938 sources by newspaper, and again by news frame and source within each newspaper, leaving relatively few stories and sources for analysis within each category. The analysis is based on percentages, but the charts provide numbers for a more complete understanding of the nature of each paper's coverage.

News Frame

The majority of stories in *The New York Times, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal,* and *The Washington Post* fall into the "other" category, because their leads and headlines use impartial language or are anecdotal. However, both the *Times* and the *Post* have a higher proportion of stories that fall in the conflict news frame than do *USA Today* or *The Wall Street Journal* (see Chart 5). This difference may be in part a function of the topics covered.

The *Post* and the *Times* cover campus management more frequently than do *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal.* In both of these papers, most campus management stories contain conflict. In addition, while *USA Today* has a reputation for taking a generally positive tone in its coverage, its proportion of stories with a success news frame is not much greater than that of the *Post,* the *Times* or the *Journal.*

The newspapers differ in their coverage of the top 10 education topics and in the types of sources quoted.

Despite these differences, framing is similar among the four papers. The newspapers are less similar in their coverage of the top 10 education topics and in the types of sources quoted. This section analyzes each newspaper individually and describes how the newspapers vary in their coverage of higher education.

The New York Times

The *Times* generally does not diverge from the other papers in its coverage of the top 10 topics. However, the distribution of topics covered most resembles that of *The Washington Post.* The *Times* and the *Post* also employ similar levels of framing among the five categories.

One distinctive feature of the *Times'* coverage is its focus on campus management issues, which is the highest

CHART 5: PROPORTION OF NEWS FRAME BY NEWSPAPER (IN PERCENTAGES)

	Conflict	Consensus	Failure	Success	Other	% Total
NY Times	34.6	0.6	3.4	5.6	55.9	100
USA Today	22.7	0	1.3	8.0	68.0	100
WSJ	28.9	0	4.4	4.4	62.2	100
Wash Post	34.0	0	3.8	3.8	58.5	100
Total	31.9	0.2	3.3	5.2	59.4	100

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CHART 6: THE NEW YORK TIMES

Topic	Percentage	Number
Affirmative Action	11.2	20
Campus Mgmt.	34.1	61
Campus Perf.	3.9	7
Costs	5.0	9
Crime/Tragedies	11.7	21
Financial Aid	10.6	19
Govt. Relations	5.0	9
Job Market	2.2	4
Military Academies	10.1	18
Research	6.1	11
Totals	100	179

One distinctive feature of the *Times'* coverage is its focus on campus management issues, which is the highest among the four publications.

News Frame by Topic (%)

Topic	Conflict	Consensus	Failure	Success	Other
Affirmative Action	30.0	0	5.0	0	65.0
Campus Mgmt.	39.3	0	1.6	8.2	50.8
Campus Perf.	14.3	0	0	14.3	71.4
Costs	33.3	0	11.1	0	55.6
Crime/Tragedies	23.8	0	9.5	0	66.7
Financial Aid	21.1	5.3	5.3	15.8	52.6
Govt. Relations	66.7	0	0	0	33.3
Job Market	0	0	0	0	100
Military Academies	55.6	0	0	0	44.4
Research	27.3	0	0	9.1	63.6

among the four publications. This could have more to do with local events in the New York area in 1997 than with news priorities. The City University of New York (CUNY) experienced a controversy involving its chancellor in 1997, and Adelphi University, also in the New York City area, was caught in a controversy involving its president and board of trustees (see Chart 6).

The coverage of CUNY and Adelphi may also explain the high level of the conflict news frame in campus management stories, a level that is higher than in the other topic categories, with the exception of military academies and government relations.

The *Times* is similar to the other newspapers in its types of sources used, quoting a high proportion of campus administrators and relatively few faculty. However, it differs from *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal* in that articles quote a higher percentage of presidents and chancellors (see Chart 6). *The Washington Post* quotes presidents and chancellors at about the same rate as the *Times*. This may reflect both papers' high number of campus management stories, which frequently quote presidents

Sources Cited

Source	Percentage
Administrators	21.8
Advocacy Groups	12.4
Experts	7.8
Faculty	10.2
Presidents/Chanc.	15.6
Professionals	8.3
Public Officials	13.7
Students	10.2
Total	100
Total Number of Sources = 372	

Proportion of Sources Within Topics

Topic	Administrators	Advocacy	Experts	Faculty	Presidents/ Chancellors	Professionals	Public Officials	Students
Affirmative Action	20.3	23.7	8.5	6.8	8.5	8.5	20.3	3.4
Campus Mgmt.	27.5	6.1	5.3	16.0	25.2	5.3	7.6	6.9
Campus Perf.	33.3	13.3	13.3	13.3	6.7	6.7	0	13.3
Costs	6.3	18.8	25.0	0	18.8	6.3	18.8	6.3
Crime/Tragedies	31.4	8.6	5.7	5.7	8.6	11.4	11.4	17.2
Financial Aid	3.1	21.9	18.8	0	3.1	6.3	34.4	12.5
Govt. Relations	5.6	11.1	0	5.6	16.7	11.1	44.4	5.6
Job Market	28.6	28.6	14.3	0	0	14.3	0	14.3
Military Academies	28.6	2.9	0	5.7	17.1	17.1	2.9	25.7
Research	8.3	16.7	8.3	25.0	12.5	8.3	8.3	12.5

or chancellors as well as administrators (see Charts 6 and 9).

USA Today

USA Today covers the "consumer" aspects of higher education — cost, financial aid, and the job market — at a greater rate than do the *Times* or the Post. *The Wall Street Journal* also covers these topics frequently (see Chart 8). By printing a relatively high proportion of stories on access to college education and its benefits, *USA Today* appears to give priority to topics that interest students and their parents.

By contrast, the *Times* and the *Post* appear to be more concerned with the management of higher education and other institutional issues. *USA Today* also covers the military academies and affirmative action at a greater rate than do the three other papers.

Of the four papers, *USA Today* quotes the highest proportion of students and advocacy groups. Its coverage of college costs, financial aid, and the job market — topics of primary concern to students — helps explain why students are a principal source appearing in stories. *USA Today*'s healthy coverage of

CHART 7: USA TODAY

Topic	Percentage	Number
Affirmative Action	13.3	10
Campus Mgmt.	9.3	7
Campus Perf.	8.0	6
Costs	10.7	8
Crime/Tragedies	10.7	8
Financial Aid	16.0	12
Govt. Relations	5.3	4
Job Market	8.0	6
Military Academies	16.0	12
Research	2.7	2
Totals	100	75

News Frame by Topic (%)

Topic	Conflict	Consensus	Failure	Success	Other
Affirmative Action	40.0	0	0	0	60.0
Campus Mgmt.	14.3	0	0	14.3	71.4
Campus Perf.	0	0	16.7	16.7	66.7
Costs	25.0	0	0	0	75.0
Crime/Tragedies	25.0	0	0	0	75.0
Financial Aid	8.3	0	0	16.7	75.0
Govt. Relations	25.0	0	0	25.0	50.0
Job Market	16.7	0	0	16.7	66.7
Military Academies	41.7	0	0	0	58.3
Research	0	0	0	0	100

***USA Today* appears to give priority to topics that interest students and their parents.**

affirmative action may explain the frequent appearance of advocacy groups as sources.

The Wall Street Journal

Like *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal* focuses on "consumer" issues relevant to higher education: financial aid and the job market. Many of its stories on the job market note how the economy affects employment prospects for graduates. While its coverage is similar to *USA Today*'s in some respects, the *Journal* covers affirmative action less frequently than do the other four newspapers.

It is perhaps not surpising that, with its focus on the economy, the *Journal* quotes the highest proportion of professionals. It often cites members of the business community about the types of graduates they are hiring and how the economy influences their decisions. The *Journal* is also distinct in rarely quoting university presidents and chancellors; they make up just over 1 percent of all the paper's sources – far less than the other papers.

Sources Cited

Source	Percentage
Administrators	17.8
Advocacy Groups	19.3
Experts	11.9
Faculty	3.7
Presidents/Chanc.	10.4
Professionals	9.6
Public Officials	11.1
Students	16.3
Total	100
Total Number of Sources = 135	

Proportion of Sources Within Topics

Topic	Administrators	Advocacy	Experts	Faculty	Presidents/ Chancellors	Professionals	Public Officials	Students
Affirmative Action	38.6	26.9	3.8	0	7.7	3.8	0	19.2
Campus Mgmt.	18.2	27.3	9.1	0	9.1	18.2	0	18.2
Campus Perf.	7.7	23.1	15.4	7.7	23.1	0	15.4	7.7
Costs	15.4	7.7	23.1	15.4	7.7	7.7	15.4	7.7
Crime/Tragedies	22.2	44.4	11.1	11.1	0	0	0	11.1
Financial Aid	16.7	11.1	5.6	0	5.6	11.1	38.9	11.1
Govt. Relations	11.1	22.2	11.1	0	22.2	0	22.2	11.1
Job Market	0	14.3	28.6	0	0	21.4	14.3	21.4
Military Academies	15.8	5.3	0	5.3	21.0	21.0	0	31.6
Research	0	33.3	66.7	0	0	0	0	0

The Washington Post

As previously noted, the *Post*'s coverage is similar to that of the *Times* in terms of topics covered. The *Post* covers campus management issues at a far greater rate than do *USA Today* and the *Journal*. Like the *Times*, the *Post*'s coverage was affected by local events in 1997. The University of the District of Columbia (UDC) faced budgetary and management difficulties in 1997, and The George Washington University sold its hospital. The *Post* paid significant attention to these issues.

Finally, of the four papers, the *Post* has the highest proportion of stories on campus-related crime and tragedies. It is unlikely that local events significantly influenced this coverage, as many of the stories on this topic appear outside the paper's Metro section.

It is no surprise that, given its location in the nation's capital, the *Post* quotes the highest percentage of public officials, especially federal legislators. What's more, the paper quotes public officials more frequently than the other newspapers do in stories on costs.

CHART 8: THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Topic	Percentage	Number
Affirmative Action	6.7	3
Campus Mgmt.	15.6	7
Campus Perf.	2.2	1
Costs	6.7	3
Crime/Tragedies	0	0
Financial Aid	20.0	9
Govt. Relations	8.9	4
Job Market	26.7	12
Military Academies	2.2	1
Research	11.1	5
Totals	100	45

News Frame by Topic (%)

Topic	Conflict	Consensus	Failure	Success	Other
Affirmative Action	33.3	0	0	0	66.7
Campus Mgmt.	14.3	0	14.3	0	71.4
Campus Perf.	0	0	0	0	100
Costs	33.3	0	0	0	66.7
Crime/Tragedies	0	0	0	0	0
Financial Aid	33.3	0	11.1	11.1	44.4
Govt. Relations	75.0	0	0	0	25.0
Job Market	0	0	0	8.3	91.7
Military Academies	100	0	0	0	0
Research	60.0	0	0	0	40.0

Many of *The Wall Street Journal*'s stories on the job market note how the economy affects employment prospects for graduates.

Furthermore, it quotes public officials more frequently than it quotes any other source in college cost stories. While the samples are small, the totals indicate that public officials have a significant voice in the *Post* on the issue of college cost. Public officials are also the most frequently quoted source in the *Post*'s financial aid stories, a practice matched by the other three papers.

Summary

There are similarities among the papers in their coverage of topics and use of sources, and some of the ways in which they differ probably have to do with their location and market. Both the *Times* and the *Post* give relatively heavy coverage to campus management issues, which coincides with 1997 events on local campuses. The *Post* also quotes public officials more frequently than do the other papers, which is no surprise for a newspaper based in the nation's capital.

Other differences probably reflect each newspaper's audience, news priorities, and editorial mission. *USA Today* gives significant coverage to consumer issues

Sources Cited

Source	Percentage
Administrators	18.9
Advocacy Groups	10.0
Experts	18.9
Faculty	6.7
Presidents/Chanc.	1.1
Professionals	20.0
Public Officials	11.1
Students	13.3
Total	100

Total Number of Sources = 90

Proportion of Sources Within Topics

Topic	Administrators	Advocacy	Experts	Faculty	Presidents/ Chancellors	Professionals	Public Officials	Students
Affirmative Action	0	28.6	14.3	0	0	14.3	28.6	14.2
Campus Mgmt.	36.4	9.1	9.1	9.1	9.1	18.1	0	9.1
Campus Perf.	0	50.0	50.0	0	0	0	0	0
Costs	28.6	14.3	42.8	0	0	0	0	14.3
Crime/Tragedies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Financial Aid	20.0	13.3	13.3	13.3	0	6.7	26.7	6.7
Govt. Relations	33.3	16.7	0	0	0	16.7	33.3	0
Job Market	17.2	0	24.1	3.5	0	31.0	3.5	20.7
Military Academies	0	0	0	0	0	50.0	50.0	0
Research	9.1	9.1	18.2	18.2	0	27.3	0	18.2

of concern to students and their parents, such as college costs, financial aid, and the job market. *The Wall Street Journal*'s coverage reflects a similar orientation. Its focus on business and economic issues accounts for relatively heavy coverage of the job market for college graduates.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most striking quality of higher education coverage in 1997 is the focus on topics not specific to colleges and universities. All four newspapers frequently reported on college management issues, crime and tragedies, and affirmative action. By contrast, they devoted significantly less attention in the newspaper clips examined to research and curriculum — the cornerstones of academe. By highlighting budgets, personnel, race, and crime, these papers cover topics

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CHART 9: THE WASHINGTON POST

Topic	Percentage	Number
Affirmative Action	8.8	14
Campus Mgmt.	33.3	53
Campus Perf.	5.7	9
Costs	4.4	7
Crime/Tragedies	16.4	26
Financial Aid	10.1	16
Govt. Relations	3.8	6
Job Market	0.6	1
Military Academies	13.8	22
Research	3.1	5
Totals	100	159

News Frame by Topic (%)

Topic	Conflict	Consensus	Failure	Success	Other
Affirmative Action	57.1	0	0	0	42.9
Campus Mgmt.	35.8	0	7.5	0	56.6
Campus Perf.	0	0	11.1	33.3	55.6
Costs	14.3	0	0	0	85.7
Crime/Tragedies	15.4	0	0	0	84.6
Financial Aid	37.5	0	6.3	12.5	43.8
Govt. Relations	83.3	0	0	0	16.7
Job Market	0	0	0	0	100
Military Academies	36.4	0	0	0	63.6
Research	60.0	0	0	20.0	20.0

The *Post* has the highest proportion of stories on campus-related crime and tragedies.

relevant not only to higher education, but also to corporations, communities, and institutions outside of higher education.

The papers most often quote campus administrators as sources. They also regularly cite public officials and advocacy groups. By contrast, they seldom quote faculty, who are fundamental to research and the curriculum. Students comprise a significant proportion of sources. However, the overall results suggest that in quoting sources, the papers do not show an interest in the news value of colleges and universities as educational entities, a finding consistent with their choices of topics covered.

An examination of each individual newspaper shows that all four share many of the same preferences for topics and framing. However, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* focus more on institutional issues, such as campus management, than do *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*. This is in line with the *Times*' and the *Post*'s interest in covering local events. By

Sources Cited

Source	Percentage
Administrators	20.2
Advocacy Groups	12.0
Experts	5.0
Faculty	7.9
Presidents/Chanc.	14.4
Professionals	9.4
Public Officials	17.9
Students	13.2
Total	100

Total Number of Sources = 341

Proportion of Sources Within Topics

Topic	Administrators	Advocacy	Experts	Faculty	Presidents/ Chancellors	Professionals	Public Officials	Students
Affirmative Action	8.3	30.6	11.1	5.6	2.8	13.9	19.4	8.3
Campus Mgmt.	24.8	5.6	0	9.6	21.6	8.0	16.8	13.6
Campus Perf.	22.7	13.6	4.5	18.2	9.1	0	13.6	18.2
Costs	15.4	23.1	7.7	0	15.4	7.7	30.7	0
Crime/Tragedies	17.0	8.5	10.6	2.1	8.5	14.9	17.0	21.4
Financial Aid	9.7	19.3	12.9	0	6.5	12.9	32.2	6.5
Govt. Relations	0	20.0	0	10.0	10.0	10.0	50.0	0
Job Market	33.3	33.3	0	0	0	0	0	33.3
Military Academies	34.3	2.9	0	5.7	25.7	5.7	5.7	20.0
Research	21.1	15.8	10.5	26.3	5.3	10.5	5.3	5.3

contrast, *USA Today* and the *Journal* pay more attention to the consumer perspective on higher education, emphasizing topics such as financial aid and the job market. Those topics focus on the costs and benefits of a college education rather than the workings of individual institutions.

Did the press cover higher education fairly in 1997? Should the press focus more on issues such as research and curriculum that are germane to academe? Do the media have an obligation to better inform the public about matters that form the roots of our system of higher education? This analysis cannot answer such questions, but it can provide a framework for beginning to explore them.

Appendix

Topics

The topic categories are mutually exclusive. When stories cover two or more categories, the topic in the lead and headline determine the category of a story.

Admissions/Applications
Stories concern the number of applications a college or campus received, or the admissions process. Stories pertaining to affirmative action are placed in the Affirmative Action category.

Affirmative Action
Stories focus on campus policies, court decisions, or legislation pertaining to affirmative action, including the impact of Proposition 209 in California.

Campus Groups
Stories pertain to student organizations, such as fraternities and clubs, and student life in general.

Campus Management
Stories focus on campus budgets, cutbacks, finances, personnel changes (hirings, firings, departures), and accreditation.

Campus Performance
Stories report on how the campus functions in areas not pertaining to management issues, such as the ability of graduates to perform in the workplace, and graduation rates.

Costs/Price
Stories concern tuition levels but not financial aid, which has its own category.

Crime/Tragedies
Stories cover crimes committed on or near campuses, crime rates, binge drinking, fires, and other campus accidents.

Curriculum
Stories focus on graduation requirements and course offerings.

Faculty Issues
Stories discuss academic freedom, union activity, or other faculty issues, excluding tenure, which has its own category.

Federal, State, and Local Government Relations
Stories focus on the relationship between campuses and government agencies or institutions, regarding topics such as research budgets, but not financial aid or affirmative action.

Financial Aid
Stories discuss resources available to pay college costs, legislative activity pertaining to financial aid programs, scholarships, tax credits, default rates on student loans, and related topics.

Fund Raising
Stories concern specific gifts to campuses or fund-raising practices in general.

Job Market
Stories focus on job opportunities and earnings for college graduates.

International
Stories examine higher education beyond the United States.

Military Academies
Stories are about one or more service academies, and include admissions,

crimes, management, or any other topic as it pertains to military academies.

Rankings

Stories pertain to media rankings of colleges and universities.

Research

Stories report research findings of higher education faculty.

Tenure

Stories cover tenure as an issue, or report on individual faculty who did or did not receive tenure.

Town/Gown Relations

Stories concern relations between colleges and their surrounding communities.

Testing and Standards

Stories discuss the SAT or ACT, students' scores, or math and language competency examinations at colleges and universities.

Other

Stories do not fit into any of the above categories. Possible topics include dormitory living, non-traditional students, electronic mail on campus, and commencement, for example.

News Frame

News frame is the tone or perspective established in each story's headline and lead. When the headline and lead have different frames, the lead determines the news frame. The study categorizes five types of framing: conflict, consensus, failure, success, and other. Conflict and consensus are frames that describe the words or actions of sources. Failure and success are frames that reflect a journalist's perspective. Stories with a headline and lead that do not fit into these frames are in the "other" category.

Conflict

Conflict frames include either criticism by one party of another (e.g., a faculty member criticizing an administrator) or a disagreement between parties.

Consensus

Consensus frames include praise of one party by another or agreement between two or more parties.

Failure

Failure is an account of the shortcomings of one or more individuals, an institution, or a policy.

Success

Success is an account of the accomplishments of one or more individuals, an institution, or a policy.

Other

"Other" frames do not fall into the previous four categories. They describe an action or topic in innocuous terms or use an anecdote to illustrate a larger trend.

Sources

The study considers only the presence of a particular type of source in each story, rather than the number of times a source appears. For example, a story quoting one college president four times has the same "source" as a story quoting four different college presidents. The categories are mutually exclusive. Some sources could fit into more than one category, so the context in which the source was quoted helps to determine the appropriate category. For example, a

member of a campus' board of trustees could be a campus administrator, an alumnus, or a professional. If such a source were commenting on the campus of which he or she was a board member, the source would be coded as a campus administrator.

Advocacy Groups

Sources include members of associations, representatives of ideological or political organizations, and lobbyists.

Alumni

Sources include alumni or alumnae of a college or university.

Campus Administrators

Sources include vice presidents, deans, and members of a campus' board of trustees, but not presidents or chancellors, who are listed in their own separate category.

Experts

These are sources quoted as an authority on a given issue. Experts include faculty who are cited for their expertise on an issue discussed in the story. For example, an economics professor who is quoted in a story about the job market for college graduates is categorized as an expert rather than as a faculty member.

Faculty

Sources include full professors, adjuncts, department chairs, and members of faculty senates. Faculty quoted for their expertise on topics that do not include curriculum and research are categorized as experts.

Ordinary Citizens

Sources are ordinary persons who offer their view of an issue analyzed in a given news story. They can also be a relative or spouse of a source in another category, such as the husband or wife of a campus president or faculty member.

Presidents/Chancellors

Sources include presidents and chancellors of colleges and universities.

Professionals

Sources include lawyers, business persons, doctors, and other professionals who do not provide an expert opinion.

Public Officials

Sources include government officials, judges, police officers, and candidates for public office.

Students

Sources include high school students, college students, and graduate students, who are often identified as teaching assistants or research assistants.

About the Author:

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